



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2008
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DAYTON DRUG DEALER SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR DRUG TRAFFICKING AND WEAPONS CHARGES

First Life Sentence in Dayton Under Federal Drug Felony "Three Strikes" Law

DAYTON - Mark J. Thornton, age 33, of Dayton, was sentenced in United States District Court here today to life imprisonment, without the possibility of release, for his role in a drug trafficking conspiracy in Dayton. A United States District Court jury convicted Thornton on October 18, 2007 of drug conspiracy and trafficking, as well as a related firearms crime, arising out of his and a co-conspirator's activities in purchasing multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine from Mexican suppliers, re-packaging the cocaine into smaller quantities and converting some cocaine into crack cocaine, and then re-selling the narcotics to other street-level drug dealers and users in the Dayton area.

Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, Eric Spradling, Special Agent in Charge, Drug Enforcement Agency, and Richard Biehl, Chief, Dayton Police Department, announced the sentence handed down today by United States District Judge Walter H. Rice.

The jury convicted Thornton of one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 5 kilograms of cocaine and more than 50 grams of crack cocaine, one count of possession with intent to distribute more than 500 grams of cocaine, and one count of possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug crime. The jury acquitted Thornton of one count of possession with intent to distribute more than 50 grams of crack cocaine.

Testimony presented at trial revealed that, after supplying smaller quantities of cocaine to his long-time friend, Nirvana Martin, Thornton started pooling his money with Martin in mid-2005 in an effort to purchase kilogram quantities of cocaine for purposes of re-sale. From at least August 2005 until October 12, 2005, the day of a Dayton police raid, the two purchased at least a kilogram of cocaine each day from Mexican suppliers operating in the Dayton area (namely, at least 75 kilograms of cocaine). The cocaine would typically cost the pair approximately \$20,000 per kilogram. Taking the kilograms of cocaine to various "spots" or drug houses in the Dayton area, Thornton and Martin would re-package the cocaine into smaller quantities for "around the clock" re-sale to other drug dealers and users. Cocaine would also be converted into crack cocaine for re-sale. The evidence further indicated that on October 12, 2005, after obtaining a search warrant, Dayton police detectives and officers raided one of these drug houses, located at 2316 Eastview Avenue, where they encountered both Thornton and Martin, among others. During the execution of the search warrant, officers recovered numerous weapons, nearly a kilogram of cocaine in various packages, over 50 grams of crack cocaine, digital scales, and drug packaging material, including numerous discarded kilogram-size cocaine wrappers--one with a "Lacoste alligator" label--containing cocaine powder residue.

Thornton was charged with these counts in a multi-count indictment filed December 14, 2005, and was arrested on the charges on February 13, 2006. Thornton was further charged with having two or more prior felony drug convictions (namely, three felony-level drug convictions in state court) which, under the federal drug felony "three-strikes" law, and due to the cocaine

amount being in excess of 5 kilograms, carries a mandatory life sentence upon conviction. In a pre-sentencing hearing on February 14, 2008, the Court confirmed all three of these prior felony drug convictions and today imposed the mandatory life sentence without the possibility of release on the federal drug conspiracy conviction, along with a concurrent 264 month sentence on the cocaine possession with intent to distribute conviction, and a mandatory consecutive 60 month sentence for the firearm conviction. Thornton was also ordered to complete 500 hours of residential drug treatment while in prison. Thornton's life sentence is the first life sentence in Dayton under the federal drug felony "Three Strikes" Law, which went into effect in 1988.

"The federal drug felony 'Three Strikes' provision carries a serious penalty for serious drug trafficking by repeat offenders. These men were responsible for poisoning many Dayton houses and streets with cocaine," Lockhart said. "The combination of guns and drugs in particular contribute greatly to the level of violent crimes on our streets, especially when the drugs are being distributed by repeat, armed drug offenders. By federal and local agencies working cooperatively, we can make our community safer."

United States Attorney Lockhart commended the efforts of the DEA Task Force officers and Dayton Police detectives for their investigation of the case, as well as Assistant United States Attorney and Deputy Criminal Chief Vipal J. Patel and Assistant United States Attorney Brent G. Tabacchi, who prosecuted the case in court.

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